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ABSTRACT Paul Goodman's criticisms of and proposals for institutions, including educational institutions, have as their foundation 1) a set of leading principles derived from experience and centered in a transactional view of experiences and 2) a concept of "self" which constitutes a theory of human nature. Human nature is viewed as process: tendencies or dispositions actualized in contacts in the organism/environment field which, in turn, affect the ways in which a person approaches and contends with experience. Goodman's use of phenomenological method, his attention to experimental verification, and the essentially pragmatic foundation of his philosophy provide an empirically and logically sound basis for his theories. (Author)

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A Philosophy of Man and Woman

Paul Goodman's Theory of Human

Nature

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Paul Goodman has been accused of being naive and romantic: of believing that human nature is innately good in spite of innumerable acts of inhumanity over centuries of social life. He has been accused of believing that if human beings were only left alone, uncoerced by oppressive institutions, their innate goodness would manifest itself automatically in desirable choices which would somehow generate a society of harmony and good will. One needs only to listen to one's feelings and act spontaneously.

This view of Goodman as a romantic who rejects "standards" and advocates "doing one's own thing," as if all things a person might do were equally worthwhile so long as they emanate from some "felt need," is not uncommon. Many who have a substantial investment of time, money and effort in the present educational, economic and political systems appear to view Goodman's ideas as impractical and foolish, the quixotic visions of an idealist yearning for perfection and unity in a world of continuing change, scarcity, competition and insecurity.

As will be shown, this view of Goodman is incorrect. However, given the way Goodman writes, it is not surprising that many people infer that Goodman imagined that human beings could attain a perfection of being if only conditions were right, if only people could grow up into a worthwhile world. Goodman's poetic style where "...the actual truth is freely distorted and made a symbol for the underlying concern" does increase ambiguity. Goodman understood that the poetic style of writing and speech is often an impediment to understanding some of the substance of his ideas and the logic supporting those ideas, but he nevertheless chose this style in preference to what he calls "scientific semantics"² not only because he wished a wider audience, but also because he believed

that the academic style tends to depress the emotional involvement of the reader and tends to reinforce the detached stance that passes for "scientific objectivity" but which is more likely to be a distorted way of viewing events and ideas. Goodman knew well that no one ever does anything for intellectual reasons alone, that the energizing force for and in human action is some emotional commitment - including commitment to a life of the mind. And, ultimately, Goodman wanted a better world.

Methodological Considerations

Paul Goodman is no more a romantic than John Dewey. He shares with Dewey an essentially pragmatic philosophical position. His leading principles are derived from experience and are centered in a transactional view of experience. As in the case of Dewey, the experiential base constitutes a kind of zero point: the "original, forceful, meaning-laden reality in which we exist."⁴ This is the Gestaltist view of the "irreducible unity" of the organism-in-the-environment which can be broken up analytically "only at the price of annihilating what one intended to study."⁵

This transactional view of experience is at the foundation of Goodman's theory of human nature. Goodman distinguishes the person-thinking-about-the-environment from the person-in-the-environment. The latter is in a sense more basic for it precedes in time and logic any concepts a person may entertain about the environment or about experiencing. Hence the term "prepredicative" to refer to such experience.

Goodman also shares with Dewey the use of phenomenological method and the insistence that the worth of any theory is to be found not in conformance or correspondence to some ultimate reality but in the extent to which the theory illuminates human experience, i.e., in the extent to which the theory is useful in the broadest sense of the term. Yet, it is Goodman's emphasis on phenomenological data and experience in theory construction and his appreciation of the multidimensional nature of human beings and varieties of human experience that provide some of the fuel for the accusation that Goodman is a romantic. What such critics do not seem to realize is that Goodman's selection of methodology depends on the context of the problem being explored. Like Dewey, Goodman refused

to oversimplify the nature of phenomena in order to study them "scientifically," i.e. to apply the techniques appropriate to the physical sciences so as to yield truth that is in Ayer's term "strongly verified." Such a position falsely assumes that only the techniques of the physical sciences have the capacity to yield truth that is adequate for theory construction. A single concept of inquiry is made the primary standard by which the multitude of kinds of experiencing are to be investigated. Thus, the kinds of experiences which are not amenable to inquiry in terms of already predetermined limits are relegated to an inferior status among the intellectual concerns of human beings. What was originally a means formulated to enhance the ability of persons to deal more adequately with the world becomes a blinder narrowing their perceptions of possibilities.

As descriptive data presupposes pre-predicative experience, Goodman does not hesitate to use phenomenological data in the construction of his views. Goodman believes that one who refuses to admit phenomenological data to science is "guilty of suppressing evidence."⁸ The result is a truncated view of the universe which includes, of course, that dimension of the universe we call "human nature."

There is no lapse into subjectivism here. The contention that the phenomena and data on which an adequate theory of human nature must rest are subjective or private and, therefore, cannot be shared relies on an a priori assumption, in this case, that there is an absolute distinction between objective and subjective. Moreover, the question of the sharability of private phenomena is an empirical one, and it has not been established that these phenomena are not actually shared by others. How completely these phenomena may be shared is a separate but again empirical question. Goodman would agree that certain kinds of ideas are more easily communicated than others. The difference depends not on any absolute difference between subjective and objective phenomena but on the degree to

which there is a common fund of experience and knowledge and on the difficulties involved in devising concepts that can be clearly defined and are adequate for describing and explaining such phenomena.

How so-called subjective data are obtained is another question. Goodman suggests that they are typically obtained through intuitive processes, and he agrees with Spiegelberg that "careful intuiting and faithful description require a considerable degree of aptitude, training and conscientious self-criticism."⁹ In fact, Goodman, Perls and Hefferline who together authored Gestalt Therapy present a series of exercises designed to put one in touch with one's feelings or proprioceptive behavior, a necessary condition for obtaining accurate phenomenological data.¹⁰

It should be understood that intuitive grasp of phenomena does not imply a mystical means of obtaining knowledge. The term "intuition" is used to describe a wide variety of ways of knowing or understanding, such as mathematical intuition, where a person achieves a plausible solution to a problem without being able to provide a formal proof. Or intuition may be used to indicate "having a feel" for some subject or problem, the ability to make good guesses quickly or to select the best avenue of approach to a problem without systematically thinking through the alternatives, part of what Whitehead means by "style."

Intuitive grasp of phenomena indicates a way of knowing, a means of understanding, but not a way that, at least at present, can be analyzed into a series of well defined steps. Hence, it is different from analytic thinking which is characterized by explicit steps that can be adequately reported by one person to another.

All of this is consistent with Israel Scheffler's analysis of theory construction or the generation of ideas. In The Language of Education Scheffler states:

It does not follow that the production of proofs can be generally characterized in advance, that we can say generally what pattern of speaking or writing movements constitutes a sufficient condition for problem-solution in geometry or mathematics. That such a characterization is impossible is demonstrable on mathematical grounds alone. This situation is general in science as well, where, though theories, once produced may be evaluated as to their scientific worth, we have no general rule for the production of worthwhile theories. To think of problem-solving as a complex sequence of movements governed by rule is thus a myth.¹¹

Goodman's position is one of methodological tolerance for, like Dewey, he believes that the conception of any phenomenon or method is itself a product of on-going experience. And while Goodman argues that the worth of any theory depends ultimately on whether it illuminates human experience, he agrees that the likelihood of worth tends to be increased by careful attention to the criteria by which theories are constructed: accuracy of data, clarity of definitions, attention to the nature of propositions, logical consistency, etc.

Goodman's attention to these criteria, his mooring in experience and the fact that he assumes as little as possible about either the nature of the world or of human beings help him avoid the logical and practical difficulties that ensue from positing absolute principles and metaphysical entities. Goodman has a metaphysics, but it is a metaphysics of pragmatism--a set of leading principles

which are derived from experience and which, therefore, must be regarded as probability statements. Goodman agrees with Sidney Hook and John Dewey that leading principles of thought constitute a logic to the extent that they control the process of inquiry.¹² He also shares Hook's view that "formal logic is a limiting case of probable inference."¹³ In Goodman's words:

Logic is science plus the principle of exclusion. This formulation gives the essence of 'analytic propositions' with more materiality than postulate-sets and without their arbitrariness. Logic is the structure of any bracketed-off 'finished' system of inquiry.¹⁴

Implicit in this view is the denial of conceptions that have no foundation in experience. Goodman contends that "...everywhere the only solution of a human problem is experimental invention."¹⁵ This means that knowledge is "knowledge of" and it implies differentiation from experience. Knowledge, therefore, is a contextual matter; there is no knowledge "in general" or "a priori." And, as experience is the source of all knowledge, it is also to experience or contextual situations that one must return to establish the truth of a proposition. In other words, Goodman is insisting that validity is to be determined by non-phenomenological assessment. He writes specifically in Five Years, "I don't know of any way to demonstrate except by evidence."¹⁶

When Goodman writes that knowledge "sound and tested under conditions of controlled observations...contributes mightily to man's actual and potential control over the conditions of his living,"¹⁷ he is acknowledging that the scientific approach to inquiry has a vital place in people's lives. But Goodman is careful not to elevate science to a position where it determines the selection of problems for research. Goodman's approach to inquiry enables him to consider as possible areas of research the full complexity of human behavior in all its richness and profusion. His approach to gathering data about

phenomena which cannot be quantified and measured either in part or in full; but, nevertheless, phenomena which are within the ken of human experience, e.g. the feeling of being hurt, or being angry, is quite flexible and dependent on the entire context in which the inquiry occurs. Goodman uses the term "informal experimentation" ¹⁸ to describe the approach he advocates for learning about behavior which is not amenable to scientific inquiry strictly conceived, i.e. conceived in a positivistic way. The term suggests the practical necessity of verifying statements about these phenomena by referring to experience and, simultaneously, it allows the "informal experimenter" to use whatever specific methods of gathering data that seem suitable, however "subjective" they may appear to be. As Goodman says, "...We cannot avoid the psychological...." ¹⁹

Toward A Theory of Self

In Growing Up Absurd Goodman notes: "Confusion is the state we are in

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and we should be wise to cultivate it." When Goodman calls conflicts between the personal and the social a "state of promise," he is reiterating Dewey's notion that inquiry arises in problematic situations and that emotion is the energizing force and source of spontaneity for the solution of problems or, in Goodman's lexicon, for the making of creative adjustments, or contact.

Goodman's term "spontaneous dominances" which he calls "judgements of what is.

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important in the occasion" points to the same fact of existence Dewey is

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noting when he characterizes impulse as indicating a "natural value." Goodman does not make the error of assuming that spontaneous dominances indicate a line of action that should necessarily be pursued. He categorically denies this

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when he states, "Spontaneous dominances...are not adequate evaluations."

It should be apparent that an adequate creative resolution may mean the postponement of immediate gratification and may involve, in more Deweyan words, careful deliberation about the consequences of an act before carrying through a decision. Goodman states that the suppression of the expression of a feeling in the original form in which it may arise is often fundamental to the adequate resolution of conflicts. Goodman is really talking about self-control, but control that is exerted consciously on behalf of one's own purposes. He states, "In some situations holding back is necessary....The important question is whether or not the person has rational grounds for presently choking off be-

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havior in given circumstances."

Goodman asserts that "(i)t is a basic tendency of the organism to complete

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any situation or transaction which for it is unfinished..." This statement

should be understood as a generalization from experiences where contact is interrupted rather than an a priori statement about the nature of human nature. The phenomenological data that support this assertion may be found in Gestalt Therapy in Goodman's discussion of the mechanisms that function in contact and which can disrupt contact. But, in any case, since problems occur in the organism/environment field, it is observable as a matter of fact that the inability to resolve an important problem adequately results in dissatisfaction with some actual situation which, if sufficiently important for the person concerned, will divert that person's attention and energy from new problems to the more crucial but as yet unfinished problem which continues to demand a more satisfactory resolution.

The absence of awareness of what is at work in oneself is repression, which involves a build up of energy that is not expended in the solution of the "real" problem. Repression manifests itself in anxiety which Goodman defines as the experience of breathing difficulty. Goodman is consistent with others in psychology when he states, "...The vitality of any natural drive is strong; it can be alienated but not annihilated."²⁷ The lack of awareness impairs the quality of contact to "safe" areas of experience, for it precludes the coming into awareness of the very phenomena that must be understood if a satisfactory creative resolution is to be achieved. The lack of awareness results not only in the continuation of patterns of behavior that are not genuinely satisfactory to the person but, as the mechanisms become reinforced, they become harder to break. Thus, the tendency to repeat the same unsatisfactory behavior is increased, and satisfactory resolutions of problems become more and more unlikely.

This is, of course, a description of neurosis which Goodman defines as the

"premature pacification of conflicts." It is not that there is no contact in neurotic behavior, but there is a lack of flexibility and awareness so that the person is only in partial touch with reality, the "givenness of experience." As there is a tendency to avoid emotion-arousing experiences, the result is the conception of a diminished world of possibilities. This is what Goodman means when in New Reformation he speaks of "metaphysical confusion" and "religious crisis." He says of youth "that they are sure there is no world for themselves" and he bemoans their "lack of sense of history." Both the healthy and the unhealthy (neurotic) person may be engaged in a situation, but neurotic persons are unable to address themselves adequately to the new developing situation. There is a lack of spontaneity or healthy deliberateness which Goodman defines as "aware restricting of certain interests, perceptions, and motions in order to concentrate with a simpler unity elsewhere."²⁹ ³⁰ ³¹

When a creative adjustment results in the resolution of a problem so that the feelings associated with the problem do not interfere with the person's handling of future problems, they are taken by Goodman as a sign of growth. Both Dewey and Goodman conceive of growth in a similar way. Like "experience" "growth" is a zero term and gets its meaning in specific contexts. Dewey speaks of a general criterion for growth that Goodman states as the continuing capacity to achieve more adequate creative resolutions of problems. An obvious example is the working through of anger where the anger is felt and is translated into behavior that leads to resolution and satisfaction, a closure of that situation. In such a case there is no neurotic repression or "gummysacking." This means that the person can approach new situations in a fresh or open way and relate to them with sensitivity and objectivity. The modes of relating involve the identification of relevant variables and the comprehension of the interrelatedness of these variables in the so-called external situation with the variables that may be called "subjective" or "internal."

Contact and Self

The notion of contact forms the cornerstone of Goodman's theory of human nature. To contact is to complete a gestalt or, alternatively, to make a creative adjustment in the organism/environment field. Goodman conceptualizes the process of contact in five stages, each having associated with it a distinctive mechanism which may foster or inhibit the flow of experience into the formation of a clear gestalt. As Goodman defines the self as the process of contacting, the self is context-dependent and transient; it is constantly in the making.

One of the clearest definitions Goodman offers is the statement: "The self is not the figure it creates but the creating of the figure: that is, self is the dynamic relation of ground and figure."³² As the self is the process of contacting, it follows that the healthy self works spontaneously for its completion and then its extinction rather than for its perpetuation. This must be so for contact is transient; the organism assimilates novelty and achieves a creative resolution which then becomes part of the ground of future contact.³³

Therefore, Goodman does not conceive of self as inherent or within any person, for despite the fact that the word "self" tends to be used as a noun, a substance term, there is no good reason to imagine that it denotes any thing and very good reason to comprehend the term as connoting a process knowable only through phenomenological analysis. It should be regarded as a system of contacts to be identified with what is coming rather than what has been. Goodman's statement that the self works spontaneously for its extinction implies a rejection of the view that there is a self to be perpetuated or actualized or that one can "lose one's self."

Goodman believes that creative persons have faith that they will be adequate to the situation whether they win or lose. He quotes the formula of Tao:

By finally 'standing out of the way'...they disengage themselves from their preconceptions and how it 'ought' to turn out. And into the 'fertile void' thus formed, the solution comes flooding.³⁴

In a creative person there is

...a sense of readiness: the acceptance of excitement, a certain foolish optimism about the alterability of reality, and an habitual memory that the organism regulates itself and does not in the end wear out or explode. The answer to the question 'Can you do it?' can be only 'It's interesting.' A sense of adequacy and power grows as the particular problem is met and generates its own structure, and new possibilities are found in it, and things surprisingly fall into place.³⁵

The similarity of Goodman's notion of self with that of Dewey is striking.

Dewey states, "...(T)he self is only as it acts or reacts." "There is no one

ready-made self behind activities."³⁶ And when Dewey asserts that "It thinks!"

is a truer psychological statement than 'I think,'³⁷ he is suggesting not only the belief that mind is essentially an adverbial concept indicating how well a person handles experience but also agreement with Goodman's contention that

"(W)ith complete assimilation the knower and his knowledge are one. There is no 'application of knowledge' to a situation...but only the person-in-action."³⁸

This is what Dewey means by "reconstruction of experience" which, as he points out in Human Nature and Conduct, is significant not so much in terms of any "difference of quantity, but what kind of a person one is to become, what sort of self is in the making, what kind of world is making."³⁹ The term

"reconstruction of experience," then, points inward and outward. In connection with this understanding, Dewey notes, "...(W)hen self-hood is perceived to be an active process it is also seen that social modifications are the only means of the creation of changed personalities."⁴⁰ Both Goodman and Dewey share an interest in the "growing points" - without which the world would be dead.⁴¹

Goodman refers to the growing point as the contact-boundary which is "where experience occurs" in the interaction of the organism and the environment. When contact proceeds spontaneously, there is a sense of unity or of integration. Where, during any of the stages of contact, it becomes interrupted, the boundaries become fixed and the situation is prevented from progressing to a satisfactory resolution. When satisfactory creative resolutions are attained, the situations become quiescent or approach equilibrium and the self is diminished. The existence of the self, then, is tied to "conflict, contact, and figure/
background."

The Theory of Human Nature

The self as the system of creative adjustments or contacts at any given time may be viewed as being identical with the nature of an organism. Therefore, human nature is process, a potentiality in the sense that it is continually making itself in the present. It becomes or comes into being in achievements in the organism/environment field, but then it passes into history as ongoing experience demands new contacts, new resolutions. Clearly, human nature is malleable but "not so completely malleable that the nature can be disregarded . . . ; it is also surprisingly resistant."¹³ Goodman is not asserting that there is some "original human nature."¹⁴ Goodman is referring to the making of good contact, to achieving the sort of resolutions that actually lead to growth. He is speaking of what is possible when the organism is healthy and when the environment allows truly satisfying resolutions of conflicts.

Further, the conception of what is possible does not imply a romantic notion about the goodness of people, i.e. a notion that is not born out of experience. As Goodman says, "Theorists have gone too far in showing that the underlying drives are 'good' and 'social'; they have tried too hard to be on the side of the angels."¹⁵ Goodman's referent for what is possible is

What is actual in the spontaneity of children, in the works of heroes, the culture of classic eras, the community of simple folk, the feeling of lovers, the sharp awareness and miraculous skill of some people in emergencies.¹⁶

It is not that all children act spontaneously, not that one ought always to follow the dominances that arise, not that community life is idyllic or that all aspects of the culture of classic eras are worthy, not that lovers do not quarrel, but that these kinds of incidents and events tend to show the enormous powers of human organisms to "discover themselves and one

This conception of human nature is quite close to that of John Dewey, and it seems clear that both Dewey and Goodman speak of human power and creativity in essentially the same way. Neither assumes a generalized existence of classes of impulses under which specific acts are subsumed. Both agree that knowledge of human power and creativity stem from a generalized analysis of particular acts. Both would assent to Dewey's contention that "(e)ach impulse or habit is 'a will to its own power;'"⁴⁸ and there is "no generalized will to power, but only the inherent pressure of every activity for an adequate manifestation."⁴⁹ Both would concur that "(i)t is not so much a demand for power as search for an opportunity to use a power already existing."⁵⁰

However, even an optimistic person like Dewey was aware that opportunities for creative expression are not always easily found, for Dewey realized that impulses, which are the sources of the "original plasticity" that affects the "ability to form habits of independent judgement and of inventive initiation" have tended to be warped, taken advantage of and mechanized prematurely after the established pattern of adult habits of thought. He writes:

The combined effect of love of power, timidity in the face of the novel and a self-admiring complacency has been too strong to permit immature impulse to exercise its reorganizing potentialities.⁵¹

Dewey is speaking not merely of parents but of institutions, which he defines in part as "embodied habits."⁵² Dewey, like Goodman, does not rail against all institutions and conventions; as Dewey says, "Not convention but stupid and rigid convention is the foe."⁵³

It seems apparent that neither Dewey nor Goodman is seeking any return to nature or a freedom within the individual person that disregards existing institutions. As Dewey notes, "such efforts are likely to find their "terminus in chaos."⁵⁴ Goodman would also agree with Dewey's statement:

To view institutions as enemies of freedom, and all conventions as slaveries is to deny the only means by which positive freedom in action can be secured.⁵⁵

Goodman sometimes uses the term "original nature" because he sees neurotic human nature as the effect of a neurotic culture, a learned response to "unnatural conventions" and "unnatural coercions." Goodman does not believe that all coercion is "unnatural." He believes that it is permissible and desirable for the adult to impose some decisions on the child, for by "judicious coercion" the child's ego "can take its time and not feel called on too quickly to stand alone as sole authority." Goodman is saying that the child may require protection by the adult if the child's ego is not to "crystallize too rapidly and inflexibly" so as to restrict spontaneity.

The word "unnatural" does not, of course, refer to something other than natural causation. As Goodman states, "...the bad institutions as well as the good have come to be by natural process." There is nothing occult about either the processes by which any institution comes into being or the result, i.e., the particular institution that may be under consideration, though the processes and the results may be destructive of human growth. It is apparent that Goodman is using the word "unnatural" poetically. He seems to intend only to emphasize his concern for the dehumanizing effects of a society "that is not outrageously bad but it is far from adequate and stands the test poorly." He also states, "The difficulties are arduous; to persist as a man does require unusual moral character, intellect or animal spirits." Goodman would agree with Dewey:

Thousands feel their hollowness even if they cannot make their feelings articulate. The confusion which has resulted from the size and ramifications of social activities has rendered men skeptical of the efficiency of political action. Who is sufficient unto these things? Men feel that they are caught in the sweep of forces too vast to understand or master.

However, Goodman claims we can persist as full human beings or "make do" as he terms it, but "(w)e must start from where we are." When Goodman asks "Under what conditions do public spokesmen...(ask) for new ethics and a mean-

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ing for existence...when there are concrete tasks glaring in the face?"

he is denying that there are truly no opportunities for the creative resolution of conflicts. The choice, as Goodman views it, is not either conform to the "absurd system of ideas, believing that this is the human community," or dissent totally from the system so that no effort to change existing

⁶⁵ situations is expended, for both alternatives have the effect of restricting experience and the possibilities for the kinds of experience that can lead to worthwhile activity. Both alternatives are cases of interrupted growth or interrupted contact. Thus, in answer to Goodman's question about the conditions under which people ask for new ethics and a meaning for existence, one must reply, "under conditions where one is out of touch with the existing situation."

The significant issue, then, is whether human beings are able or can become able to confront the world so as to effect changes that would bring the structures and organizations of society that are out of human scale into human scale. When one realizes that human nature is inextricably tied to the presence of objects to confront and the belief in one's power to confront and affect these objects, it becomes plainly evident that the reorganization of institutions is a necessary condition for the development of an adequate human nature.

Goodman's specific proposals to reconstruct social institutions into structures that are responsive to human needs and demands are predicated on what appears to be an inductive theory of human nature which seems philosophically adequate and which contains within it theoretical constructions that point not only to what should be, but that illuminate and provide reasons for some ways in which people are prevented from becoming what some philosophers, and indeed all humanists, believe human beings can be.

Footnotes

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33. Goodman et. al., op. cit., p. 415
34. Goodman et. al., op. cit., pp. 358-359.
35. Goodman et. al., op. cit., p. 415.
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